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Assessing Wellness Needs of Breast Cancer Survivors in Vermont

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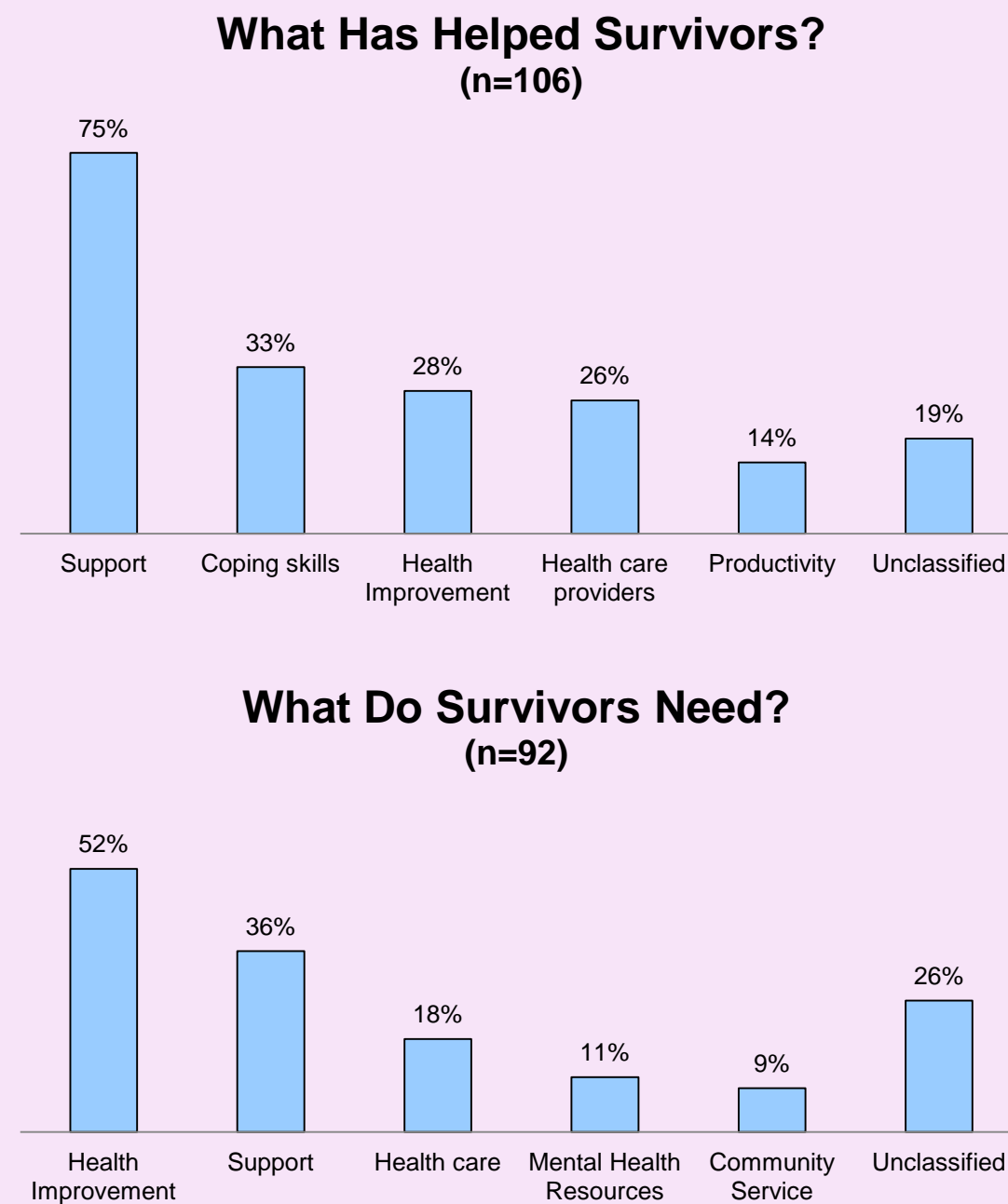
Background

- In Vermont, 500 breast cancer diagnoses are made annually^{1,2}.
 - As of 2005, epidemiological data suggest that as many as 7,000 breast cancer survivors were living in VT³.
- Dragonheart Vermont's "Survivorship NOW"⁴ initiative aims to bridge the gap between treatment and recovery.
- A literature review, including the Taking Charge⁵ program and a survivor needs assessment done by Dr. Geller⁶, supported conducting a needs assessment in three areas: exercise, nutrition, and emotional support.
- UVM COM paired with Dragonheart Vermont's "Survivorship NOW" initiative to determine how to best address these needs.

Methods

- An anonymous two-page (16 item) survey assessed survivors' needs and community involvement.
- 127 surveys were obtained from breast cancer survivors out of the 208 identified cancer survivors attending the 4th Annual Vermont Cancer Center Breast Cancer Conference, October 2011 (7 respondents' data excluded).
- Dragonheart miniature batik dragons were provided for survey completion.
- Responses to open-ended items were re-coded into one of 6 categories.
- Likert-like scales (very unlikely, unlikely, likely, very likely OR strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree) were used for items targeting support program settings; responses were collapsed into 2 categories for the purpose of statistical analysis.
- 2 x 2 X² tests (alpha = .05, 1 tailed) were used to assess associations between participants' interest in nutrition/other programs and the settings of those programs.

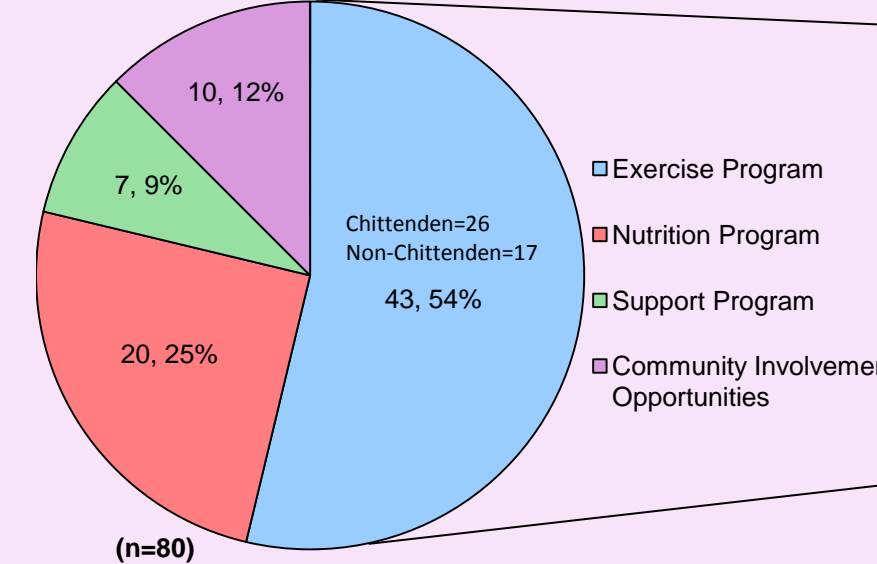
Results



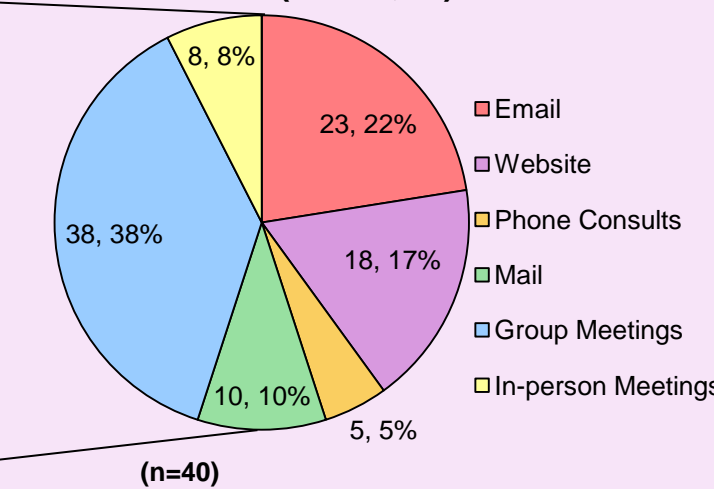
Demographics (n=127)

Category	Percentage
Location	
Chittenden County	57%
Not Chittenden County	43%
Age range	
<50	18%
50-59	39%
60+	43%
Diagnosis year	
Before 2007	54%
2008-2011	46%

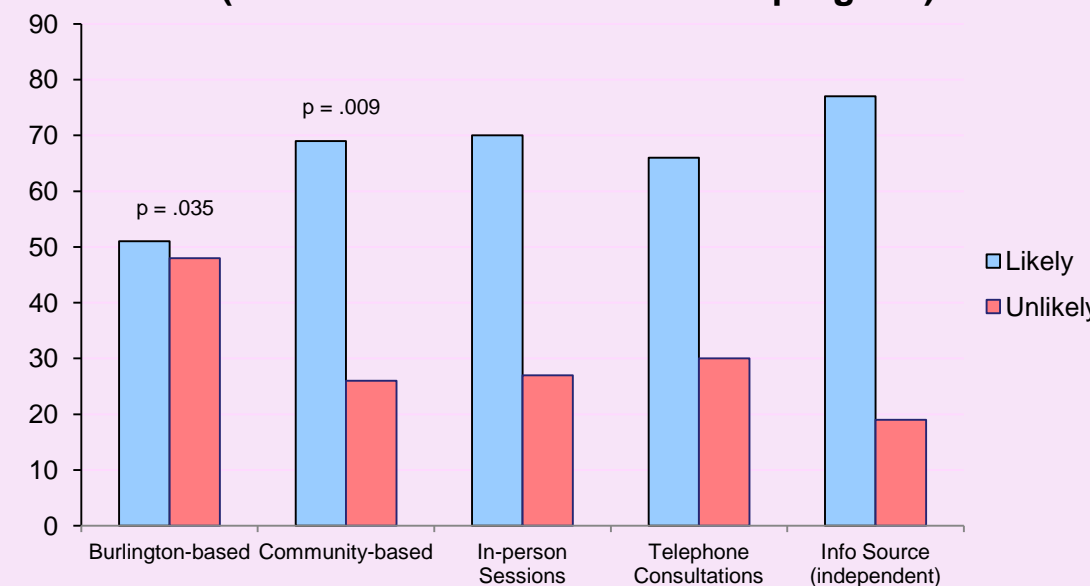
What Programs Do Survivors Want? (count, %)



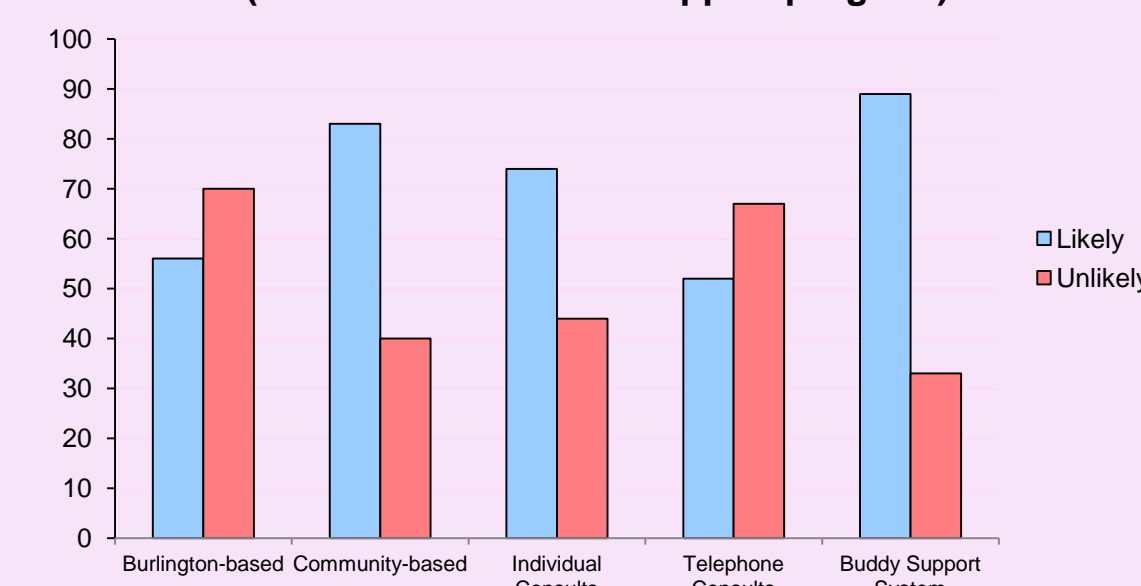
What Type of Exercise Program Do Survivors Most Want? (count, %)



What Type of Nutrition Program Are Survivors Likely to Use? (n=101 interested in a nutrition program)



What Kind of Support Are Survivors Likely to Use? (n=125 interested in a support program)



Discussion

- Respondents most frequently indicated that health improvement resources for nutrition and exercise would help them have a better quality of life.
- In these data, breast cancer survivors appear more likely to participate in an exercise program (relative to nutrition and other programs).
- Dragonheart Vermont's "Survivorship NOW" programming might benefit from a strong emphasis on exercise.
- 25% of respondents wanted to change their diet, indicating the importance of a nutrition component.
- According to respondents, a nutritional information source such as a newsletter would be well-received.
- Respondents cited the importance of support from family, friends and health care providers.
- Support is an ongoing need, especially in the transition from treatment to survivorship.
- Survivor matching (buddy system) could be used.
- Limitations to this study include: small population, survey respondent interpretation, bias imposed by conference themes.

Conclusion

Recommendations for "Survivorship NOW":

- Monthly newsletter/website with healthy cooking tips and consolidated nutrition information.
- "Satellite" exercise groups in communities outside of Chittenden County.
- A buddy-matching program for survivors – could be community-based.
- Giving back to the community via quilting, volunteer work, etc.

¹Breast Cancer in VT. VT Department of Health Vermont Cancer Registry. June 2009. ²Cancer Survivor Community Study. Vermonters Taking Action against Cancer. Feb 2011. ³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Cancer survivors—United States, 2007. *MMWR* 2011;60(9):269–272. ⁴Dragonheart Vermont. <http://dragonheartvermont.org/> 2011. ⁵Cimprich B, Janz NK, Northouse L, et al: Taking CHARGE: A self-management program for women following breast cancer treatment. *Psychooncology* 14:704-717, 2005 ⁶Geller, Berta. Cancer Survivors' Needs Survey. 2011.